

TEN STEPS IN SOCIOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

A typical project in sociology will include each of the following ten steps:

1. Define the topic of investigation.

Being curious and looking at the world sociologically can generate ideas for social research anywhere. The issue you choose to study is likely to have some personal significance.

Remember: Your issue must be linked to an aspect of family studies!

2. Find out what others have learned about the topic.

You are probably not the first person to develop an interest in this particular issue. Spend time in the library and see what theories and methods researchers have applied to your topic in the past. In reviewing existing research, note problems that may have come up before.

3. Specify the research question.

Are you seeking to explore an unfamiliar social setting? To describe some category of people? To investigate cause and effect among variables? If your study is *exploratory or descriptive*, identify whom you wish to study, where the research will take place, and what kinds of issues you want to explore. If it is explanatory, you must state the hypothesis to be tested, and carefully operationalize each variable.

4. Access the requirements for carrying out research.

How much time and money will your research require? What special equipment or skills are necessary? How will you do the work yourself? You should answer all these questions before beginning to design your research project.

5. Consider ethical issues.

Not all research raises ethical issues, but you should be sensitive to this throughout your investigation. Could the research harm anyone? How might you design the study to minimize the chances of harm? Is confidentiality promised? If so, how is this ensured?

6. Devise a research strategy.

Consider all major research strategies, as well as innovative combinations. Keep in mind that the appropriate method depends on the kinds of questions you are asking, as well as the resources available to support your research.

7. Gather the data.

The way you collect data depends on the research method you choose. Be sure to accurately record all information in a way that will make sense later. Remain vigilant for any bias that may creep into your research.

8. Interpret the data.

If your study involves a specific hypothesis, you should be able to confirm, reject, or modify the hypothesis based on the data. In writing your research report, keep in mind that there may be several ways to interpret the results of your study, consistent with different theoretical paradigms, and you should delve into them all.

9. State your conclusions.

As you write your final report, specify conclusions supported by the data. Consider the significance of your work both for sociological theory, and for improving research methods. Of what value is your research to people outside of sociology? Finally, evaluate your own work, noting problems that arose, or questions left unanswered. Note ways in which your own biases may have coloured your conclusions.

10. Share your results.

Make a presentation to the class; share with peers, or with those who were willing to provide primary data for you. The important point is to share what you have learned with others to let others respond to your work.